

The Expatriot

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IN CASE YOU are interested, all previous issues of *The Expatriot* are continuously available. Since it costs me about \$1 to mail a single copy to the US, and not much less elsewhere, please be so kind as to include this amount, in cash, for each issue you would like to have. (For my correspondents in France, 5F will cover this expense.) Your comments and letters are also appreciated. THE EXPATRIOT

January 16, 1995

France and Iowa: Did They Break the Mold or What? Since it strains common sense for me to have made a move to Europe, with the background program of finding gainful employment, I find a way to soothe my tested logic by inventing justifications for my sojourn that are sensual and poetic, rather than of the head. I recount the ways in which Iowa and France share common bonds, most of which are metaphoric, rather than pragmatic, in nature. I do this not in an effort to “feel at home” surely, for *not* “to feel at home” is one of the main reasons I have come; but rather to shore up the rickety structure of my thinking, and to feel like there is some perhaps obscure philosophic sense to it. I am certain that this move makes some sense, but not necessarily for the reasons that I express here. There is little doubt in my mind that these connections are more telling to me than they are to the general reader, who will maybe nonetheless find them diverting, at least.

There is one deeply-running historic link between Iowa and France that is certain, and which has been all but entirely effaced by ensuing events in their divergent histories. Iowa was once owned by France. As a part of the vast Louisiana Territory, in the form of which France claimed for itself no less than the entire western drainage basin of the Mississippi River, it was purchased by the United States

(under Thomas Jefferson's tenure as President) from Napoleon, around 1800, for the equivalent sum of a few pennies an acre.

The first recorded white men in Iowa were the French trapper-missionary team of Marquette and Joliet in 1673, and they, by all accounts, are the ones who gave Iowa its name, spelling it, in recognizably French orthography, *aïouez*. This was a word they got from the local people they encountered, which, as any Iowan suffering through Mrs. Zimmerman's fifth grade Iowa History class can tell you, means "this is the place." Its early pronunciation survives to this day in the way some Iowans, known by other Iowans as "the hicks," still call their homeland, "Ioway."

The first permanent white settler, Julien Dubuque, gave his name to Iowa's oldest city. He was a French trapper who saw an opportunity to mine lead along the Mississippi where present-day Dubuque now sits. The capital city, Des Moines, which is French for "of the monks," was named, as I understand the story, for French Jesuits who tried to bring God to the heathens in that area.

Iowa's flag is nothing less than the French tricolor, forever memorializing these historic ties; with the addition of an eagle aloft carrying a banner in its beak which promises: "*Our liberties we prize, and our rights we will maintain.*" Not quite as pithy as "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,*" but nonetheless, it's a program I can get behind. Iowa and France are both roughly hexagonal in shape. I guess that's about it.

January 17, 1995

This is the Place I feel very content now to be back in Bordeaux. My life feels calm again, after the tumultuous, unsettled weeks spent in Spain with my sister and her family. (Please don't get me wrong; it was good to see them and I am grateful for their willingness to have me; it's just that spending time with family tends to involve more emotional investment and requires more energy and tolerance

than does spending time with people you choose on your own to spend time with.) I feel like I can relax here.

Philippe does not work many hours in a week, and so often he asks me to go with him on errands during the day, and very often, too, he simply wishes to take me out and show me something. I savor these outings, and as they unfold, I notice that the city is becoming by steps more familiar, to the point where I now often venture out without a map.

I can say that at first Bordeaux the city, was to me a set of discrete, unlinked milieux, with blurred trajectories of walking or riding linking them together. As I become more accustomed to the network of streets and public squares of the city, these milieux become joined to each other in my mind. I find I build an imaginary map of Bordeaux in my head that places sites together into groups, and roughly orients them to one another. New nodes are formed when I visit a place, new connections when there are realizations like, "I saw the other side of that building from the bus yesterday. I didn't realize we were so close to this other building, too, at the time." By now the places in Bordeaux that I've seen are becoming linked in my head into an internal network, defined by my own interactions with the city, and each node awaits enrichment by visiting these places to the point where how-to-get-there-from-here becomes a matter of instinct and habit, rather than of conscious memory.

My understanding of the French language is developing, albeit more slowly, in a way that is closely analogous. I discover a new word that seems useful, putting it down in my vocabulary notebook. Later on, I find, often together with a paroxysm of intellectual ecstasy, that it links up to another word that I already knew which can in turn be hooked up to a list of words that I ferret out of *Robert*. These words sit at the tops of little hills in my mind and call out to each other from across the fog-filled valleys of ignorance. I dutifully jot down this list, because learning words in related groups maximizes the acquisition of new vocabulary, and emphasizes the

building of word relationships, which are so essential to useful understanding and expressive use of language.

As much as I enjoy Bordeaux and being here, a few issues must be made clear. Bordeaux is a dirty city, with plenty of trash and dog shit on the sidewalks. There are panhandlers who, with an intimate, strangely friendly tone akin to that of the Fuller brush salesman who darkens your door when you're least ready for it, are always eager to syphon off small change. In addition, the buildings that have been here for longer than 20 or so years (that is, nearly all of them) are draped in a black shroud of automobile exhaust dulling the otherwise light-colored stone, and lending a strange, funereal character to the sculpted faces, torsos, and entire stone bodies that ache and strain (although they seldom show it) to hold the buildings up. Bordeaux has some striking monuments, some very interesting churches, and a rich and intriguing history, but by and large, I would think that it would be not all that attractive for the tourist. This suits me just fine, as my sentiment is that there is something authentic about a place that does not put on the dog for tourists.

The Struggle of Life and Death in a Stewpot Tonight Sakina came over for dinner. Philippe had bought a big bag of mussels to cook. One of the pleasant things about living in Bordeaux is that, being close to the sea, fresh seafood is always available here. That and the fact that it never seems to get really cold here, like it no doubt is in Iowa *right now*, are two things that make it very agreeable to be here. I watched television (“practicing my listening comprehension”) while Philippe started a fire in the fireplace.

Sakina's arrival was announced by the ringing of the buzzer. In our apartment, there is no button upstairs to unlock the street door, three flights down, for arriving guests. So you either have to go down the stairs to let them in, or you have to do what we do, which is put a key in a plastic bag, tie a knot in it, spy out the window to see if it's someone you actually want to let in, and then chuck the key out into

the street. If your visitor is alert and it's not too windy, this system works well. Well, being somewhat new to the procedure, I threw out the wrong key. So there was another ring. This time Philippe threw out the right key. I got a pleasant little scolding from Sakina as we exchanged dry cheek-kisses.

By this time, everyone had noted that there was something going on in the street. Less than half a block from our door, there were six policemen, three police cars, and a group of some twenty people, at least one of whom was taking notes, and another of whom had a camera. We leaned out the window and watched for some time before we decided that a woman, who appeared to be directing the scene, was a judge and that what they were doing was re-enacting a crime in the course of a trial. "It must've been a murder," Philippe concluded. Satisfied with this explanation, we returned to the issue at hand: fixing dinner.

The first issue to resolve, by way of dinner, was how to cook the mussels. I didn't know, except the only other time I'd had them, they had been sautéed and buttered. They were good. Philippe thought that would be too much trouble, so he decided to boil them with some onions and garlic. Sounded okay to me and Sakina, so he did it. The shells were closed when we put them in the boiling water; Philippe said that they were still alive. By the time the tasty little morsels were cooked, they had split like opening flowers. I imagined that this was their desperate response to being boiled alive; the animals felt that it was getting too hot in their shells and so they were trying to go outside for a bit of fresh air and a breeze. How tragic, yet strangely entertaining. They were delicious.

During dinner, Sakina commented that she thought my French was improving. I was pleased. I wondered if it was not because, in the last few days, I had decided that to get good at understanding spoken French, I needed to keep from letting it wash over me, like street noise or elevator music. Listening requires whatever energy it takes to actively grab for meaning in the speech passing by. It's so

easy to get caught in the trap where you think you aren't understanding much and so you forget even to listen. A single syllable of meaning out of an entire paragraph of un-understood speech is something to hold onto. I believe this exercise, more: this attitude, will help me in the long run.

January 19, 1995

Things I Forgot There were some things I forgot about including in my last writings, and so therefore I will commit them to paper now. I find to my constant astonishment that a close examination of one's memory of events never ceases to divulge new details that you weren't even aware you knew.

At the Alhambra, [SEE *n°1*, p. 1908] in spite of its being a weekday in the middle of winter, there were people everywhere. The place wasn't exactly packed, but there wasn't much you could do to avoid having someone block the view while you're trying to glean some insight into the mystery of creativity. In spite of this, the crowd seemed fairly hushed and respectful. The most noticeable sound in the place was the sound of an elegantly dressed Spanish man, speaking what appeared to be fluent Japanese, to a group of Japanese visitors, apparently passionately describing the various features of the site. He was beautiful to listen to. He spoke with confidence and had his Japanese audience in the palm of his hand. His voice speaking sounded like music as he measured his words and coaxed the crowd for effect. I wasn't the only one who stopped to listen, either. I overheard a man say to a woman in French, "*c'est joli, ça*," ("that's nice") which seemed utterly appropriate to me.

The next thing is the news. I had always thought that I enjoyed watching TV news (indeed one might say that I had a bad news habit) because it's entertaining more than enlightening (which it surely is). But I quickly found, after only two weeks, that I really missed TV news, and not for its entertainment value, but for the

information. Indeed, if I ever do learn how to comprehend this largely-mumbled language, it will be because I am listening to French newscasters many nights, trying to dip some juicy scraps of information out of a brook of babble. So the point is that I love the news for a surprising reason: for the information, and not because I like to make fun of the anchor's hair or hope to see him caught off guard looking at his crotch when the camera comes back to him suddenly (although this is fun, too).

What drove it home to me is Chechnya. I had begun to hear reports about the struggle in Chechnya before leaving the States, but hadn't payed a lot of attention, as my mind was busy with other things (leaving the country) and it seemed to me at first that the whole thing would probably blow over quickly anyway; a minor blip in the drawn out history of ethnic groups fighting for autonomy. (It seems like the world is teaming with those, doesn't it?) But I'll be damned if those Chechens didn't turn up on the news every night, always in French spoken so fast and ugently that I couldn't pick up much of it. The worst of it was that I could not tell if the Chechens were holding their own or being slaughtered like veal. It wasn't until I got to Spain that all of this cleared up. My sister has a satellite dish, and on it she gets SKY and CNN. So all the time I was in Spain I was a total news junkie trying to get a fix. Every night I'd watch two or three cycles of CNN's half-hour broadcasts (which I found to be much more informative than SKY's) just to feel like I'd caught up with the world.

(Here in France, they re-broadcast *The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* with subtitles every morning at 7:00 on Canal+, but I'm never up that early.)

January 20, 1995

The Shipyard Last Sunday, Philippe suggested we go on an excursion to the north end of Bordeaux, where there is an old Nazi subable,

marine maintenance building or *base sous-marine*. His incentive for doing this was dual; to have something to do outside while the weather was fairly decent, and to collect wood for the fireplace. Firewood costs money, you see, but if you have a little energy, there are places where perfectly suitable fuel wood can be had for free. The idea appealed to me, because it's always more pleasant to explore places with someone, sharing comments and observations, so we hopped on a bus headed for the marine-industrial sector.

The bus ride took us briskly past many of the key historic sites in Bordeaux; part of the 15th-century *Château du Hâ* (an inexplicably un-French name of apparently unknown derivation); the *Cathédrale St.-André* (constructed beginning in the 13th-century), the western end of the *Esplanade* (“Place”) *des Quinconces* (boasted as being the largest city plaza in the Europe) which is dominated by the frilly 19th-century seaside fantasy of naked-people-cavorting-in-a-fountain in bronze *Monument des Girondins*; and then proceeding down the *Cours de Verdun*, with its stand of grandiose 18th-century façades. By the time we got off the bus, Bordeaux the bustling city had pretty much petered out to the odd apartment building or the indifferent business.

We walked from our stop, across a bleak pier, toward an imposing reinforced-concrete structure that looked like the blood-sucked wraith of some outsized office building, presenting a decidedly sinister aspect. It was titanic, gray, authoritarian in geometry and functional in structure. Built by the Nazis some fifty years ago, it is now being used by private boat-repair enterprises. A yawning hole, with steel reinforcing rods exploding out of it, in the middle of the overhang that rims the top of the forty-foot-high structure, offers the grim visage of serious wartime bombardment. A spray of bullet holes pock the outer wall beneath, adorned with a sporadic outburst of more recent and dubiously-inspired graffiti.

As it turns out, Philippe is keen on bird-watching. (The one thing he asked me to bring him from the States was a field guide to North

American birds; I obliged him with the Audubon [*odda-bun*] Society's. "Ah, Audubon [*oh-due-bō*], a French name," he delighted, upon receiving it.) Anyway, while out looking for firewood, his sharp eyes espied a cormorant and a kingfisher, both of them merely blurs to me by the time they were announced and my eyes had focused.

After spending perhaps two hours exploring and scrambling about among the dry-docks, the cranes, and the other maritime maintenance structures, we walked back with a sackful of wood along the quay which runs the whole length of the long side of the crescent of the Garonne which Bordeaux straddles. It was beautiful weather, the sea gulls were out, there was the smell of dead fish in the air and a light breeze, and it was an excellent day for a walk.

January 22, 1995

Life, Death, Suicide, and Commemoration As I believe I mentioned in my previous communiqué, I had visited Bordeaux before, in 1989. Then, too, I stayed with Philippe, although at that time he lived with Sonia and their son Samuel in an apartment on the *Rue du Mulet*, which is farther north in the oldest part of town. Philippe and I shared an interest in publishing the products of our ideas and creative work, which remains the case to this day. I hadn't met him at all before, but we had corresponded for several years and exchanged publications with each other. So before coming to Europe I asked if I might meet with him. He suggested that I stay a week, which I did.

When I appeared on Philippe's doorstep in 1989, I had just come from the Festival of Plagiarism in Glasgow, where an entire week spent in the Transmission Gallery with others of like-minds, surrounded by walls covered with photocopied collages and other "plagiarized" artwork, left my head still buzzing with the excitement of the long evenings spent in Scottish pubs sharing ideas. It would be fair to say that the Situationist International and its writings had a big influence, negative or positive, on everyone there and that the

event itself was by some accounts an extension of the Situationist “program.” At that time, these ideas were very new to me and very heady, and I brought some of this excitement back with me to Bordeaux. Philippe was already acquainted with the writings of the leader of the S.I., Guy Debord, and we made partial use of our week together discussing his work and the importance to each of us of the S.I. Philippe had the advantage of having read Debord’s texts in their original French (Debord has generally not been well-served by his English translators).

In an interesting turn of events, Guy Debord committed suicide on 30 November, the day before my flight for Europe. When I called Philippe from Amsterdam, on 9 December, to tell him I would be on my way to Bordeaux the following day, this was one of the few things he felt he had to tell me then, because he knew I’d want to know. Had I stayed in America, I might not have found this out until someone from Europe saw fit to mention it to me in a letter. Obscure as he is in the States, Debord is well-known in France among the educated, and the news of his death was on the front page of the daily *Libération*.

An extra dimension to this story was the fact that Debord had just consented a few months earlier to having his works presented on French television, after some 20 years of living, by one account, practically as a hermit, refusing public appearances and refusing to let his films be shown, but continuing to write and publish sporadically. By one account, he had become paranoid after the murder of his friend, patron and publisher Gérard Lebovici in 1984, under suspicious circumstances. To this day, Lebovici’s killer(s) have not been found; according to this account Debord believed that there was a conspiracy, possibly within the French government itself, to rid France of radical intellectuals. (I also remember hearing that Lebovici was the husband of Catherine Deneuve, but I have been unable to authenticate this.) Another story I heard had Debord gathering all the unsold copies of his books in all the bookstores in France and its

hoarding them. This story also claimed that he was hunting down all of the copies of his films and destroying them, and refusing repeated requests to make video transfers of them. Any connection there might be between these stories (which I cannot authenticate) and Debord's suicide would be purely speculative (and highly tenuous).

These television programs that Debord had consented to, three in all, would consist of Debord's film works, including one he'd recently completed, as well as his own film adaptation of his 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle*, a transcript of which had been published by Lebovici's publishing house, Champs Libre (now Éditions Gérard Lebovici), and which I had read in English translation, having acquired it at City Lights in San Francisco while visiting Ralph last spring. Philippe had a friend of his in another town record the programs in succession for him onto one video cassette. Three nights ago, on Thursday, Philippe and I went over to Patrice and Céline's. They have a *magnetoscope* (a cool cyber-punk-sounding word which means VCR), and had some interest themselves in seeing the Debord films. (Their apartment, near the *Place St.-Michel*, is even more flights of stairs up than ours is. Every time I walk up one of these narrow twisty French stairwells, I wonder how it is that people succeed in moving their furniture in. It must be really back-breaking work.)

We sat and watched the films. I found them very interesting; I could understand a lot of the language and could always get the drift. (Interestingly, abstract intellectual French is a lot more comprehensible to me than the everyday spoken variety. That's simply because they use much the same technical and philosophical vocabulary we do to describe abstract concepts, largely consisting of words based on Latin and Greek. It's interesting to note how, after thousands of years, these two classical languages have persisted in this form of an international *lingua franca*.)

After watching two of the three programs, we decided to give ourselves a break from the headiness of the subject matter, and so

we sat around and socialized for awhile. Patrice, whose English is eager but limited, was explaining to me about his and Céline's interview zine, *Bardamu: Journal d'Interviews*. It is journalistic in thrust, with paid advertising, and basically consists of interviews with local cultural figures. It looks very well done; he gave me a back issue which I will read when I get the chance.

The Golden Mean and other Esoterica Philippe had to go to Nantes on Friday morning, and had to stay overnight, so he asked me to feed lunch to his son Samuel. I agreed; hey, anything to help out. He's a nice kid, and he makes the most amazing sound effects when he plays with his plastic action figures; he sounds like the soundtrack to a fight scene in a Saturday morning cartoon. It's funny to listen to it. Maybe I'll include it in a tape piece. Lunch with Samuel took place without major incident.

After I dropped Samuel off at school after lunch, I went to the FNAC, which is a big electronics supermarket with good prices on most things, to buy a new toner cartridge for my laser printer. In an effort to be extra-cautious, I had shipped the printer without its cartridge in place out of concern that the toner would somehow find its way out of the cartridge if the box got excessively jostled during shipment. Unfortunately, the separate box that the cartridge was sent in has not yet arrived, so I am paying a price for being careful. In France, toner is expensive by American standards, because apparently the French put a hefty tax on foreign-made goods. They're a little bit protectionistic.

I also bought a ream of A4 paper, which is the standard size over here, roughly equivalent to "letter size" in the states. The price wasn't bad; less than four dollars. I have formatted *The Expatriot* to lay out on A4, in an attempt to make use of indigenous materials whenever I can. I admire the proportions of this standard of paper, and am now realizing a long-held dream, to put it too strongly, to work in this format. It is particularly elegant as a proportion because it maintains

aspect ratio when cut in half, quarters, eighths, etc. (I know, it seems esoteric, but hey, I like paper.)

January 25, 1995

The French: Snooty or What? I am slowly absorbing more and more of the language. My reading and dictionary-hunting activities are paying off; of this I am certain. I understand more and more of what is said to me (still not enough); and I am reading faster than before; although I have to admit that my list of words to be looked up does not seem to get any shorter from one reading to the next. I have over a thousand new words in my computerized flash-card system designed to help me learn them, perhaps half of these I have actually learned at this point, and since I got here.

A word will seem familiar, but I'm not sure of its precise meaning, and so I look it up. Along the way, I discover that it is related to another word that I already know; only the linkage was missing. I find that learning words in linkages and clusters in this way is better, more thorough, and more intellectually stimulating than by rote memorization, which doesn't have very good retention for me, anyway. At least this is true in terms of learning vocabulary, which requires that the data remembered be flexible and, like a computer's most useful form of memory, random-access; rather than having the form of a list imposed on them.

One of the really interesting things for me about French, and is something that slowly dawned on me, is that it really and truly is Latin in some deep sense. I will explain. People think that English has a lot of Latin in it, and surely it does, but in terms of the words we use every day for basic conversation and getting around, the vast majority of these are Anglo-Saxon. We tend to use Latin-derived words for technical and intellectual terms or words intended to create psychological distance (*assemble* for *put together*; *report* for *tell*; *amorous* for *in love*; etc.), and for names for things that did not exist

when English was being formed (*automobile, video, factory*). We also use words of Latin descent conventionally in speech to give it a more formal or more educated tone. Words like *get, wash, happy, sad, take, go, love, leave, have*, etc., are Anglo-Saxon. They are characteristic of the staccato monosyllabic vocabulary of the core of our language; of “deep” English.

Now if I were to say to someone in English, “Get me a fork, will you?”, there’s nothing extraordinary about this. But if I were to say to someone, “Obtain a fork for me, please,” it would instantly draw attention to itself, and possibly even arouse some suspicion about an ulterior motive. That’s because *get* is our everyday (Anglo-Saxon) word and *obtain*, which means basically the same thing, is of a Latin derivation, and has a rather stuffy, formal quality.

In French, the verb meaning *to get* is *obtenir*. This is, in essence, the same word as our verb *to obtain*. But for the French, this is an everyday word, having the same work-horse quality as our verb *to get*. A problem arises sometimes when I form a sentence in French, and wonder why it sounds so formal and unnatural to me. Sometimes, I worry that I sound like some pompous American idiot. I am slowly learning that part of this is because of my Anglophone predisposition to give a quality of formality and weight to words of Latin derivation; to engage in French, in other words, the meta-significance of Latin words in English.

The Phylloxéra Tonight was the release party for the latest (and final) issue of Patrice’s interview magazine *Bardamu*, and so Philippe and I were invited to the Phylloxéra, an art club, on the *Rue de Ruat*, to join in the festivities. The party wasn’t slated to begin until 11:00, and we got there at 11:30 and the place was utterly packed. Smoke hung in the air thick as milk. People poised at tables, acting arty. The beer I had there was expensive, about \$2.50, but it was excellent and had a delightful whisky-like taste. Actually, \$2.50 is not terrible for bottled beer in the States, but tap beer wasn’t avail-

to my knowledge, and this is the road I usually go because it is cheaper, so that is what I am comparing it to. I often have to adjust and then re-adjust my judgement as to how expensive things are here. It seems like most food items are on a par with American food; however, my toner cartridge for my laser printer cost me about 40% more than what it would've cost me in the U.S.

Patrice was passing out free copies of *Bardamu* to anyone who asked for them, with a free cassette tape included. I graciously accepted one and we prattled for a moment, exchanging my inadequate French for his inadequate English. I can't help liking the guy; he's so earnest. He funds the thing with advertising and also gets special rates from a copy shop that does the printing and saddle-stitching. Philippe had mentioned at our last meeting with Patrice that he wants me to present my work, and so Patrice wanted to talk to me about that possibility on this night. He said that the management of the Phylloxéra was up for it, and so I just need to let them know when I think I'm ready. I know that right now my French is not quite up to it, so I'd like to wait as long as possible. But I think both Philippe and Patrice are eager to do it.

The Phylloxéra was filled with young artistic types, and I mentioned to Philippe that the breed seems to be about the same the world over; the poses and the costumes were very familiar to me, even from the much-diluted Iowa art scene. The smoky atmosphere there made me want to smoke. Maybe I inhaled enough second-hand smoke to rekindle my addiction to nicotine, because that night and for several days after I wanted to smoke really badly. So finally I gave in, and I am now smoking again, though only about three cigarettes a day. Philippe smokes (hell, everyone seems to smoke here) and so it doesn't bother him a whit.

There was nowhere to sit down, except for a couple of chairs at a table already occupied by some art youngsters; Philippe asked if we could sit there. That was cool with them, so we stayed and watched the scene, with the tacit mutual understanding that when the band

which was setting up started playing, we'd beat it. After a few minutes, one of the young men at our table pulled out a guitar and began singing a song by Georges Brassens, which everyone evidently enjoyed. Philippe says that Brassens' lyrics are excellent, and that he has been a fan for years. I shall have to listen to more of this work (from Philippe's CD collection) before I render any sort of verdict; to me it sounds like folk music, not that that's bad.

A Nice Day for a Walk Today the weather was absolutely beautiful; just like spring. It must have been in the 60s and the sun was shining. The cobblestones, freshly washed of the dog shit and detritus from the rains we'd been having for the last few days, were no doubt drying off in the sunshine and eager to be trod upon. So, I decided to take advantage of the weather's welcome and went out promenading while Philippe was at work.

My feet took me down the *Rue St.-François* to the *Place St.-Michel*, where I found the Arabs and Spaniards cleaning up after the morning's flea market. I proceeded directly into the basilica, as such things hold interest for me nowadays. It has a vast interior, but is somewhat modestly appointed. All the stained glass is 20th-century, since the church was bombed in World War II and all the original stained glass had been destroyed. It is contemporary and a bit abstract in design, and although not a travesty, for some reason doesn't really ring true for me with the space it's in. I spent about an hour looking around; no one else was there. The only sound was that of taped choral music coming over the church's sound system, which was surprisingly successful at creating an appropriate setting.

After stopping to peruse a pile of flea market trash, in which I found an empty tin box up for grabs, I continued exploring, walking streets I hadn't yet walked to see what they offered. One street, the next one east of *Rue Ste.-Catherine*, as a matter of fact, the *Rue du Mirail*, has a really old-fashioned haberdashery with time-warp hats and suits on display. In the window was a solidly-made authentic

Basque béret for sale for 199F (about \$40). I'd like it, but I'm not sure if I'd have the guts to actually wear it.

January 28, 1995

On Ste. Véronique and her Works Philippe current passion is to author an index and study of the symbology of all the stained glass windows in Bordeaux. With this in mind, we went around to some local chapels for the purpose of research. He had obtained a list from a previous author, a priest, of all the churches and chapels in Bordeaux. So it was basically a matter of finding the address, finding out if the site has stained glass, and in the case of a chapel, which might be private, asking someone for permission to enter. In some cases a building had been demolished since the time the list had been made; at least one church had been converted into a garage.

La chapelle des Dames de la Miséricorde was located in a building under renovation, destined to be offices for a cultural center for the Aquitaine region, of which Bordeaux is a part. Because the interiors were being re-done, it had the distinction of being very clean and pleasant-looking. We stumbled upon it by chance, as the building was closed to visitors; but because a door had been left ajar by workers coming in and out, we plied entry and wandered through an ancient, but very clean, cloister, to the chapel. The windows were from the 19th-century and depicted various saints holding objects which symbolized something of their life or, in the case of martyrs, their death.

An *oculus*, or round window, the only one of its kind in this chapel, contained an image of a woman holding up a cloth upon which was the face of Christ. This is the typical depiction of *Ste. Véronique* who, in one of the Stations of the Cross, wipes the face of Jesus during his passion, which curiously leaves an image of the Saviour upon it, symbolic of his spiritual radiance and his immense suffering. I knew of this story and for a long time had considered *Ste.*

Véronique to be the patron saint of Xerox, this no doubt being one of the first instant images ever made.

The Passion of Ste. Lucie In the *Église Ste.-Eulalie*, there were many *vitraux* (stained glass windows) but one in particular was striking. The image of *Ste. Lucie* shows a woman, who appears to be weeping, with something running down her cheeks. She holds a dinner plate in her hands containing two orbs, which are the wrong color for the yolks of fried eggs. What is running down her cheeks also seems too dark to be tears. As it turns out, it is blood, and these two orbs on the plate—her eyes, which have been plucked out. As she weeps, her eyes stare back at her, dolefully, missing the warmth of their sockets.

Les Opprimés We returned to our apartment to the sound of the most lugubrious, elephantine rendition of Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" I had ever heard. A man was sitting outside our front door at the base of a street light emptying his lungs into an alto saxophone. The only thing he was in the mood for was collecting enough coins for his next bottle of wine. He was one of what Philippe calls the *opprimés*, who are, in English, "the oppressed." They panhandle, they start fights, they piss on the monuments, and they make noise while other people are trying to sleep. Philippe has little sympathy for the *opprimés*, who always seem to have money for cigarettes and wine.

The other night around 11:00, a group of them had congregated on the street right below our window. It wasn't until we heard shouts that it aroused our interest. One man was trying to start a fight with another group of men, who looked like students to me. This guy kept following another guy around, who was obviously trying to get away from any confrontation. There wasn't any fight in the end, but this gives some idea of the conditions and local color here on the *Rue Ste.-Catherine*. I enjoy watching these confrontations from the safety of a height; discretion being the better part of valor.

Une Soirée d'Art We had been invited to an art opening this evening, so after a short time at the apartment, we departed once again. It was just around the corner, down one of the streets which converges at the *Place de la Victoire*. (Most everything we seem to need is fairly close by. A car would be a difficult thing to have here because of the crowded streets, the lack of parking and its expense.)

We came to the building, and one floor up there was an artist's *atelier* where some 20 guests had accumulated to drink red wine from a large two-gallon caricature of a wine bottle and to mill about the tortured works on display. There were some paintings on the walls, which looked like paintings of interior walls from old buildings; yellowish-brown, with scraps of torn wallpaper cutting across each image, forming the only semblance of a composition. Perhaps this artist had spent too much time staring at walls, in the end finding them fascinating. There were a series of such canvasses, perhaps 10 or 12, and they may have been too sophisticated for their own good, for they failed in any way to transcend their material.

Up a dangerous stairway to a rickety loft above the floor of the workshop, there were more works on shelves, on the walls, on the floor, piles of sketches on a table. People chatted about, red wine in one hand, gesturing with the other. At least two people began their conversation with me by asking if I was a writer. I'm not sure what this means. I told them that I was a dilettante, because that comes closest to what it is that I actually do, a bit of everything with an appropriate level of seriousness, I hope. The artist whose workshop it was, Hubert, known professionally as Isidore, not only had heard of Iowa, but he'd been there, travelling north-to-south (on his way to Texas) through the state on Highway 59, which passes through Harlan, where my mother lives.

Hubert/Isidore told me that he thought my French was good. Polite exaggeration or not, this was nice to hear, and it's true that I am able to carry on conversations better and with more ease than even a week ago. But the subject matter still has to remain fairly simple for

me to maintain whatever modest illusion of grace with the language I am able to maintain.

As more people had begun congregating up in the groaning loft, I decided I (and my life) would descend to the more stable floor below. Not long after, Philippe and I left, no longer able to tolerate the screaming children of artists, who had succeeded in coopting one sculpture, turning it into a teeter-totter, and were basically making a lot of racket. Also, the environment had become wearying, and we had a guest awaiting us at home,...

Bernard, ...who is a childhood friend of Philippe's who teaches English in a rural school. He sleeps over two nights a week, because he is working on an advanced degree in English to get a higher-paying job. So he takes the train into Bordeaux for class and stays overnight. His English is very good, and I like it when he asks me questions about my native language to clarify for himself some of the finer points. I do the same; with the amount of French reading I'm doing lately, I find the same words cropping up again and again in different contexts with apparently different meanings. Both Philippe and Bernard have been very efficient and clear in their explanations of these mysteries to me.

February 2, 1995

A Flurry of Activity Lately I have been very hard-working and feeling full of ideas and productive creative work. I spent probably 12 hours more or less straight in front of my computer the other day putting touches on several projects and jotting ideas for more in the future. The last several days have been like this. It's been great.

Because Philippe and I both tend to be quiet and studious types, we are well-matched as roommates, I think. And because I don't really know anyone on my own to go visit (or receive visits from) and I don't have any sort of regular haunt here, there isn't much temptation to do anything besides explore the city, read books and

magazines, and work on my projects. One thing I would like is to have a regular haunt, just a place to hang out with cheap coffee, which would give me the opportunity to run into strangers and perhaps start some conversations. I would like to make a few friends on my own here eventually, if for no other reason than to take some of the burden off of Philippe for having to entertain me.

February 4, 1995

French Television I was going to write my impressions of French television, as it forms some part of my experience here. But recently Philippe decided to publish some of his own succinct remarks as part of his newsletter. His grasp of the subject is more experienced than mine. I think this text shows that French television is not all that different from American television. But I guess it's the subtleties (or is it the subtitles?) that make all the difference.

Philippe's Critique

That fat cow Pavarotti has made a commercial (for coffee). Coming from him, that doesn't surprise me.

Jean-Marie Cavada has the gall to declare that all television spectators love sports. He is stupid.

Michel Touret dismays me.

Sometimes there are good moments on "Ah! Quels titres!," but watching it requires patience. A low-brow literary broadcast with a dumb name, by P. Tesson and P. Martin, on FR3, around 10:30, Saturday nights.

"Les Nuls," seen on Canal+. Their claim to fame was that they were the first to say "dick" and "balls" on television. The tragedy is that they have nothing else to say.

The program "Snark" has gone off the air after 52 broadcasts. They presented very short creative films during a half hour on Saturdays at the end of Arte's broadcast day. It was truly good.

A new network: la Cinquième. Their mission is educational, which is nice. which is what all public television should be. Haven't watched it much so far. You can see a lot of good nature films late in the afternoon, and their weather maps, around 7 PM, are beautiful. But I have noticed that they sometimes have stupid shows, and the station is already dragged down by marionettes, such as the dazzling G. Klein, or Cachard, the journalist whose past peccadilloes include having broadcast a report on FR3 which revealed itself to be little more than an ad for a hotel owned by his wife.

Christmas vacation. Arte, like all the networks, shows nothing but programs that piss me off.

I like the news on Arte, evenings at 8:30, very international, very little sports, and all done in voice-over. Except for the cultural page which is usually boring.

Arte. Documentary on the 104 abstract stained-glass windows that Soulages made for the Abbey of Conques. Eight years of work in different ateliers in France and elsewhere. No indication of the sum spent on this undertaking. With an inspired air, the master explains the considerable difference in effect created by raising or lowering a certain strip by a distance of three millimeters. All this for a result as ugly and sad as if he had gone to order textured shower-door glass at the first discount hardware store he came to.

Someone recommended that I watch Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Waited in vain to be fascinated. I stuck with it for an hour. It all seemed so artificial.

The CBS Evening News is broadcast unscrambled on Canal+ at 7:00 in the morning. There are several noticeable breaks in the program where the Americans insert their commercials, which we get to escape watching in France. It's subtitled.

Perform this test. Switch to TF1. You'll find a commercial.

Alex Taylor's "Confetti," at 7 PM on Arte, is rather futile, much less interesting than the foreign reports which this journalist filed last year in the mornings on FR3.

TRANSLATION / XP

February 6, 1995

In Closing I find myself at a very interesting, albeit uncertain, point in my life. It feels, well, strange, whenever I think about the fact that I no longer live in Iowa City, the place that I called home for 18 years. I have divested myself of my job, my residence, a studio, and I have taken myself away from a number of activities that were really the reason I stayed in Iowa City for as long as I did. When I am through in Bordeaux, in a year, perhaps more/perhaps less, Iowa City will not be the place I return to; not immediately in any event. I sometimes come to a screeching halt in something I'm doing here and say to myself, more with surprise than with anxiety, "What am I doing here? Why did I leave all that good stuff behind?" To me, this feels very strange, but I kind of like it.

I must, at this juncture, take the opportunity to express my deep gratitude to my host, Philippe. His generosity and patience have helped make this visit so far a uniformly positive experience.

One thing I have not divested myself of is my friends. They continue to write. Letters this month from: Dan (along with a clipping from the *New York Times* about a big Schwitters show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris; thanks), Maria (who is alive and doing very nicely, thanks, in London), Steve (who sends along a copy of *New Observations* on the theme of "Expatriates/Homelessness," much appreciated), Geert-Jan (who comments that it's strange for him to be reading someone's diary), Mickey (who just landed a new arts administrator job in Cedar Rapids: my congratulations!) and last but not least, the new issue of *Tractor* arrived (glad to see the flag's still flying). Keep in touch, folks; the employees of the International Postal Union thank you, and I thank you. **XP**

THE EXPATRIOT

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